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Postcolonial Ecologies: The Cross-Pollination of Postcolonial and Environmental Studies

Axel Perez Trujillo

Yo miro ese universo
y soy el universo que se mira.
La finísima retina del universo mirándose a sí mismo,
eso somos.¹

—Ernesto Cardenal, *Cántico Cósmico*

Cartography has on many occasions steered imperial pursuits across oceans, territories, and peoples. Through the tracing of lands and the drawing of borders on paper, maps become the tools of empires. The stakes are much higher than simply describing the physical spaces to be colonized, for the very representation of land channels the hierarchical binaries of empires. Notice that not all spaces or blanks have equal value in a map: “Maps are defined by what they include but are often more revealing in what they exclude” (Turchi 2004, 29). Cartography imprints a set of values, whilst also withholding or ignoring other details. When the Spanish arrived in Mexico under conquistador Hernán Cortés, much effort was placed in establishing maps of the territory and effectively redrawing “the shape of the city, the earth, and the cosmos” (Mignolo 2003, 226). Many of those maps drastically shifted the mode of representing the land and organizing territories, manifesting the circulation of power that the metropolis exerted over the colonized land and people. Maps emphasize a way of knowing the geography of the territory and a way of administering its resources. As Walter Mignolo argues, maps “become a powerful tool for controlling territories, colonizing the mind and imposing themselves on the members of the community using the map as the real territory” (Mignolo 2003, 237).

Whether imaginary or physical, the setting of boundaries is tightly fastened to imperial dominance. This issue sets up an appropriate point of departure for an inquiry into the potential contribution of postcolonial studies in environmental criticism. Colonization affects both the subjugated other in the form of humans populating a territory and the nonhuman other in the form of the geography, flora, and fauna also found in that territory. By appropriating the other, empires exert dominance in several ways, one of which is the

¹ “I look at that universe / and I am the universe that looks at itself. / The fine retina of the universe looking at itself, / that is what we are” (author’s translation).

establishment of an epistemology of land—a mode of knowing and representing that territory—that is manifested in its presentation of geography, whether real or imagined.

In this paper I will argue in favour of an intersection of interests between postcolonial and environmental studies, a convergence built on the relevance of hegemony in fully understanding the notion of place espoused by environmentalists. The catalyst for the exploration of that possible collaboration will be Rob Nixon's discussion of the issue in *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011). The emphasis on how a place can sustain a rich meaning to those human and nonhuman constituents that inhabit it cannot be detached from the mode in which empires deterritorialize. Ecosystems across the Earth maintain an intrinsic value to the planet and to the humans and nonhumans that are forcefully displaced by colonial enterprises. I will analyze how the concept of place can be situated at the core of postcolonial critique so as to establish a more nuanced stance. Insofar as colonial hegemony displaces the other, it also distorts images of place in favour of an abstract geometric blank on which to draw arbitrary borders. However, the combination of theoretical concerns from both schools of criticism is not without difficulties. Specific philosophical commitments create tension between certain strands of environmental criticism and postcolonial studies.

Perhaps the most obvious point of departure is the treatment of human agency and its role in the biosphere. Both points are linked to how we understand the concept of place insofar as it challenges us to reconsider the relationship between the human and nonhuman. The concept of place informed many environmental approaches, and as such merits closer scrutiny so as to explore the possibility of a postcolonial ecology. Martin Heidegger's discussion of the *Dasein* sheds light on the tension that the concept of place generates between environmental and postcolonial studies, especially in regards to his understanding of how human beings dwell in the world. I will consider some of Heidegger's arguments so as to reveal underlying tensions in the collaboration of environmental and postcolonial studies. Environmentalists have for some time regarded Heideggerian ontology with reservation, although the significance of a postcolonial ecology brings to the forefront that reticence. Interestingly, deep ecologist Arne Naess was already keenly aware of the gravity of Heidegger's reformulation of what it means to be human in "Self-Realization: An Ecological Approach to Being in the World" (1987), insisting on the German philosopher's "amateurish" political conduct (Naess 1995b, 13). Although much can be recovered from Heidegger's philosophy, as scholar Magdalena Holy-Luczaj recently discussed in her article "Heidegger's Support for Deep Ecology Re-examined Once Again" (2015), we must be all the more mindful of the intrinsic difficulties that underlie his notion of *Dasein*. In suggesting the possibility of cross-pollinating environmental criticism and postcolonial studies, I will explore alternatives to Heidegger's ontology to construct a

postcolonial ecology with the help of some notable scholars currently researching the viability of such a collaboration.

Albeit there are considerable congruencies between environmental criticism and postcolonial studies, several difficulties arise after closer scrutiny. Rob Nixon comments on the restraint of certain scholars in regards to possible collaboration: "Yet within literary studies, a critical discipline for both the environmental humanities and postcolonial studies, such crossover work was long inhibited by a widespread assumption that the subjects and methodologies of the two fields were divergent" (2011, 234). Nixon is particularly troubled by certain trends in environmental studies that seem to steer farther away from ecological justice movements. Rather than reach out to writers and critics such as Nigerian Saro-Wiwa, he notices a striking focus on American authors in ecocriticism (Nixon 2011, 234). Although the emergence of ecocriticism did favour English and American literary traditions, there has since been a more attention on other transnational environmental studies. In Latin American studies, for example, the research of scholars such as Laura Barbas Rhoden in *Ecological Imaginations in Latin America* (2011) and Beatriz Rivera-Barnes in *Reading and Writing the Latin American Landscape* (2009) are breaking the isolation of ecocriticism into other literary traditions, although much work remains to be done on this front. Furthermore, environmental studies covers a wide spectrum of theoretical approaches that simply cannot be reduced to a single methodological monolith: "Each approach understands environmental crisis in its own way, emphasizing aspects that are either amenable to solution in terms that it supplies or threatening to values it holds most dear, thus suggesting a range of political possibilities" (Garrard 2012, 18). The multiplicity of approaches allows for a diversity of methodologies that in many ways defines the interdisciplinary dimension of environmental studies. Ecocriticism is but one of the various strands of environmental scholarship. Deep ecology and bioregionalism are also important contributions. Thus no single sweeping consideration will do justice to such field of study as a whole, yet for all this Nixon does offer a few insights as to possible discrepancies that arise between postcolonial and environmental studies. Careful analysis of those areas he sees as problematic will help guide the discussion towards the core notion of place in environmental criticism, opening up alternatives to launch the possibility of postcolonial ecologies.

Nixon outlines the following points of seeming incompatibility between both schools of criticism:

Broadly speaking, four main schisms appeared between the dominant concerns of postcolonialists and ecocritics. First, postcolonialists tended to foreground hybridity and cross-culturation. Ecocritics, on the other hand, historically were drawn more to discourses of purity: virgin wilderness and the preservation of 'uncorrupted' last great places. Second, postcolonial

writing and criticism was largely concerned with displacement, while environmental literary studies tended to give priority to the literature of place. Third, and relatedly, postcolonial studies tended to favour the cosmopolitan and the transnational. Postcolonialists were typically critical of nationalism, whereas the canons of environmental literature and criticism developed within a national (and often nationalistic) American framework. Fourth, post colonialism devoted considerable attention to excavating or reimagining the marginalized past: history from below and border histories, often along transnational axes of migrant memory. By contrast, within much environmental literature and criticism, something different happened to history. It was often repressed or subordinated to the pursuit of the timeless, solitary moments of communion with nature (Nixon 2011, 236).

Notice that although Nixon begins by insisting on the possible collaboration between postcolonial and environmental studies, he emphasizes discrepancies mainly within the field of ecocriticism. This is significant, since the approaches of each of these ecologically oriented movements established distinct methodologies that may or may not be compatible with postcolonial studies. The same could be said for postcolonial studies, for the works of Edward Said or Homi Bhabha are certainly distinct in their focus. Nixon does strike a chord when analyzing some of the important topics of ecocriticism in the American context, specifically the insistence on discourses based on wilderness and virgin landscapes, as well as the transcendental notions of history espoused by many ecocritical readings of American literature. Ecocriticism in the English tradition, for example, is far more invested in Romanticism and the pastoral tradition. Jonathan Bate is perhaps one of the most widely read ecocritics in British ecocriticism, and his work *Romantic Ecology* (1991) is representative to that effect. Yet Nixon is clearly focusing on the emergence of ecocriticism in an American context, where critics have emphasized many of the issues that he claims to be at odds with postcolonial studies.

Ecocriticism in the United States emerged in the 1990s under the auspice of the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE). The group included theorists and writers such as Cheryll Glotfelty and advocated an intellectual movement that sought to cross pollinate all disciplines with a core ecological motif: “Despite the broad scope of inquiry and disparate levels of sophistication, all ecological criticism shares the fundamental premise that human culture is connected to the physical world” (Glotfelty 1996, xix). The environment became a central concern that influenced the emergence of interdisciplinary approaches and eventually seeped into the Liberal Arts. Influenced by the emergence of ecology, ecocriticism began inquiring whether “place should become a new critical category” (Glotfelty 1996, xix). Invested in extending the reach of literary theory beyond texts, it explores how nature and culture interact.

As William Howarth elegantly writes, ecocriticism analyzes language's "ability to point (deixis)" (Glotfelty 1996, 80). Rather than isolate landscape and nature as mere metaphors in texts, it seeks to reveal the link between literature and our environment. No matter the influence of language and discourse, ecology anchored ecocriticism in a real and environmental crisis. Ecocriticism as such declines the conviction "that everything is socially and/or linguistically constructed" (Barry 2009, 243). Physical landscapes interrupt and alter figurative spaces. Nature cannot be bypassed. The environmental focus of criticism became a fulcrum to lever the humanities out of the "constant flux" of postmodernity (Glotfelty 1996, xv).

This raises certain questions regarding the relationship between the world around us and language. If indeed there is a link between our culture and the environment, how does the ecocritic unveil what lies beyond language? Certainly nature cannot be bypassed, for it is present all around us. Yet reaching out to the world outside of language is epistemologically ambitious. Naess references this difficulty in arguing the following: "One drawback with these reformulations is that they make it easy to continue thinking of two completely separable, real entities, a self and the place, joined by an external relation" (Naess 1995b, 20). How would ecocritics respond to such issue? Glotfelty's emphasis on the physical connection to the world around us seems to suggest the possibility of bypassing or filtering language so as to reach out to nature as is. For his part, Howarth admits that "ecocriticism must see its complicity in what it attacks," for all "critics are stuck with language" (Glotfelty 1996, 69). Everything might not be socially constructed, yet the question remains as to how can we recover nature if language permeates whatever it is we choose to say about nature. Kate Soper follows this line of inquiry in her book *Nature* (1995) by analyzing how the very term "nature" has a multiplicity of meanings that have evolved throughout history. Thus ecocriticism is faced with untangling language before it can reach out to the world. The emphasis of the notion of place in ecocriticism and other fields of environmental studies raises this significant philosophical issue. If ecocritics accept being considered epistemological realists, committed to the distinction between the world outside and our representation of that world, it is not clear how they escape anthropocentrism. Insofar as human language mediates between the world and us, we cannot entirely efface our imprint on the world we represent. We may insist that there is a link between the physical world and our representation of it, but the question remains as to how it might be possible to bypass linguistic mediation so as to reach nature.

A fascinating alternative is to emphasize embeddedness as central to humans' relation to the world. As such, there is no dichotomy between the world outside and our representation. Humans are embedded in their environment; they are part of the world. A notable ecological critic, Timothy Morton, has developed an object-oriented ontology that explores this possibility in provocative ways. Deep ecologists hold a similar view, insofar as they insist that "we can

make no firm ontological divide in the field of existence: That there is no bifurcation in reality between the human and the nonhuman realms” (Devall 2007, 66). Whereas ecocriticism is committed to placing in relief the environment in literary texts, other environmental scholars in deep ecology seem to offer more philosophically nuanced approaches to the ecosphere and the interconnectedness of humans and nonhumans.

Nevertheless, both positions are informed by distinct philosophical traditions. On the one hand, epistemological realism has been a central tenet of modern epistemology. The duality between the world and its representation has been a common stance among many philosophers and theoreticians. On the other hand, the notion of embeddedness came to the forefront in many philosophical discussions of the twentieth century with Heidegger’s ontology and the role of human beings as *Dasein*. Given that some ecocritics reference Heidegger as informing their approaches, it is important to explore how the German philosopher’s ontology might shape the ecocritical concept of place. I will now briefly outline the significance of place in the ecocritical tradition, so as to set up a more nuanced analysis of the possible links with Heideggerian ontology and how this lies at the core of the discrepancies Nixon claims between ecocriticism and postcolonial studies.

As we have seen, ecocriticism and other environmental humanities such as deep ecology underscore the concept of place, one of the points of departure that Nixon mentions in the cited passage. In some respects a reaction to structuralism and the role of language in twentieth century philosophy, the anchoring of criticism on the environment recovers the presence of nature in our literary traditions, not as a metaphor, but as a physical reality that manifests the escalating ecological crisis generated by industrialization and extraction of resources. Yet for all the seeming stability that the physical world brings to ecocriticism and other environmental studies, human agency is not entirely restored. The emphasis on the geological or biological aspects of an environment places the non-human in relief. Humans are no longer at the epicentre, but rather are dismissed as a threat to the equilibrium of ecosystems across the planet. Anthropocentrism is thus criticized as central to the environmental crisis. Human agency is at the heart of the planetary pillaging in its many forms that is ongoing. Here ecocriticism and deep ecology’s focus on anthropocentrism is no less problematic. Is all human interaction with the environment deleterious? Or are there certain human actions that are the basis for the destruction of the planet? Postcolonial studies can offer interesting insights as to damaging human actions, specifically those that colonize the human and nonhuman other. The environmental crisis affects everyone on Earth, but more so those that are oppressed and forced to migrate because their lands suffer from increased droughts or flooding due to climate change. Postcolonial critics focus on identifiable human actions that deteriorate the situation of the other. The possibility of a postcolonial ecology is

ties to a more nuanced understanding of the role of human beings, rather than rejecting anthropocentrism on principle. The severe exploitation of resources is one such action that disrupts not only the environment, but also the communities that depend on the land where those resources are found: “The environmentalism of the poor is frequently catalyzed by resource imperialism inflicted on the global South to maintain the unsustainable consumer appetites of rich-country citizens” (Nixon 2011, 22).

Indeed humans are responsible for imposing monoculture farms that efface diverse natural fauna and flora, as well as pilfer indigenous remedies for pharmaceutical in favour of economic benefits for transnational companies. Humans are also accountable for the vertiginous rate of species extinction insofar as they continue to alter and disrupt natural ecosystems. Unable to overlook the consequences of the *homo sapiens* in countless habitats across the planet, environmental studies places the intrinsic value of the biosphere as an urgent concern. Habitat and locality are at the core of environmental studies, especially in the fields of deep ecology, bioregionalism, and ecocriticism. Yet those actions described above are specific human actions, geared towards a model of production and consumption. A postcolonial ecology must distinguish the logic of specific human actions that damage the planet, rather than commit to rejecting anthropocentrism as a whole. Precisely, this is a valuable lesson that ecocriticism can learn from scholars such as Nixon and the notion of environmentalism of the poor. Disregarding the specificity of human actions that damage the environment and displace peoples opens up the possibility of another mode of colonialism that in its emphasis on safeguarding natural environments, displaces humans whose actions had little to do with the damage to their land.

Alfred Crosby’s *Ecological Imperialism* (1986) pointed in that polemical direction when examining the “historical embeddedness of ecology in the European imperial enterprise” (Tiffin 2010, 3). Resources have always been of key interest to empires. Some recent conservationist policies imposed on developing nations have had a severe impact on indigenous peoples and practices. One such case is pointed out by Ramachandra Guha in regards to the Project Tiger of World Wildlife Fund in South Asia, which “contributed to the displacement of poor communities who happened to live in the targeted conservation wilderness areas” (DeLoughrey 2011, 21). Such activism runs counter to postcolonial criticism’s emphasis on the ways in which the colonized others are excluded and scattered through the oppressive hegemonic dominance of the economic centres of power. Herein lies a pivotal issue on which hinges the possibility of a postcolonial ecology: precedence of the biosphere over human communities is a pressing problem to any potential alliance between both approaches to criticism.

Given the exacerbation of environmental problems, placing emphasis on habitat stewardship is extremely relevant. Notwithstanding, the disruption of those other people that inhabit the places of ecological concern is also a serious matter, one that cannot be ignored. Ecological

intervention without prior consultation of the social context that permeates the location in question is another means of exerting an oppressive hegemony that excludes the other. The colonized is once again a blemish in the cartography of old imperialisms disguised as green: spoliation under the guise of ecological conservation. Intrusions into alien habitats through the imposition of conservationist logic are indeed hostile disturbances that echo condescending colonialism. Guha explains, “such interventions virtually reshaped the societies into whose habitat they intruded” (1994, 275).

This precise intersection is a contested site between environmental and postcolonial studies. The potential cross-pollination depends on how one of the central categories of environmental studies is understood: the notion of place. The term reveals significant epistemological and ontological underpinnings. The manner in which those philosophical commitments lie beneath each of the theoretical frameworks is of crucial importance to the possibility of a postcolonial ecology. Gary Snyder expresses this clearly when he inquires as to “How does knowledge of place help us know the Self?” (Snyder 1995, 71). To open up a possible area of cross-pollination between both schools of criticism requires an exploration of how place and the self engage in a manner that is not dualistic. How is the “I” embedded in place and what does this entail? Bioregionalist writers have depicted different alternatives, discussing at length the relationship between the “I” and the place it belongs. For example, in their introduction to the *Bioregional Imagination* (2012) Tom Lynch, Cheryll Glotfelty, and Karla Armbruster argue in favour of constructing identities within local places: “By foregrounding natural factors as a way to envision place, bioregionalism proposes that human identity may be constituted by our residence in a larger community of natural beings” (Lynch 2012, 4). Notice how human identity is not entirely blurred by its residence in a bioregion. It is rather constituted by the place that it inhabits. Such a bioregional identity runs parallel to what some theoreticians in deep ecology have named the “ecological self” (Devall 1995, 115). In other words, “the more we know a place intimately, the more we can increase our identification with it” (Devall 1995, 115). Ecocriticism, however, takes a slightly different yet stimulating approach to understanding the concept of place, one that reveals the tension between Cartesian space and Heideggerian notion of being in the world. Perhaps the most concise presentation of such an approach is Lawrence Buell’s distinction between space and place. Buell’s discussion of the distinction is informed by Heidegger’s critique of Cartesian spatiality in the chapter “The Worldhood of the World” in *Being and Time* (1926).

Whereas space is an abstract concept linked to geometry, place conveys meaning and saturates land with emotive attachments (Buell 2005, 63). Place generates emotional ties, while space remains an isolated and speculative notion. Human desire is directed towards place, never simply space. Place constitutes the environmental unconscious of the subject. Hence it is

pregnant with a symbolic dimension completely absent in the fabrication of abstract space. That is precisely the reason why landscape can spark a metonymy of desire so strong so as to bind entire communities to a homeland, consolidating nationalist projects. Place is a privileged site of desire. Following Jacques Lacan, a hermeneutics of place could trace and discover the unconscious buried beneath landscape, just as the structure of language manifests psychic repressions. Space, on the other hand, is an aseptic geometry that utilizes territory. Modern scientific geography, for example, describes land in terms of coordinates, numbers that have little or nothing to do with the physical reality that they refer. Boundaries also demarcate spaces from purely conceptual vantage points.

In many cases, such fixed limits respond to administrative rather than ecological or even social factors. One clear example can be found in the division of the Canadian prairies into several provinces without consideration of the different habitats and peoples found within that region. In South America the political segregation of territories into antagonistic nations is the tragic by-product of a purely administrative centralism imposed during the colonial period of their history. Both cases also bear witness to the resulting expropriation of resources derived from carving physical habitats into abstract spaces. In essence, such manipulation of geography is closely linked to “the myth of empty lands” (Nixon 2011, 236). Imperial projects presuppose the existence of vacant lands, so as to justify spatial representations that need not account for indigenous constituents. When the Spanish arrived in the Americas, the continent was hailed as a New World on which to begin anew. Latin American scholar Angel Rama offers a stimulating analysis of how Spanish America became a space upon which to erect idealized urban centres by the empire:

This ordering impulse could do relatively little to transform the old cities of Europe, where the stubbornly material sediments of the past encumbered the flight of a designer’s fancy, but it found a unique opportunity in the virgin territory of an enormous continent. There, native urbanistic values were blindly erased by the Iberian conquerors to create a supposedly ‘blank slate’ (Rama 1996, 2).

Latin America is just one of the many examples of how empires are built on fabricating empty spaces upon which to establish their hegemony. These examples display a striking aspect of colonial cartography: empires generate Cartesian spaces that favour exploitation of resources and peoples (Buell 2005, 65). Nature is a sandbox for empires to excavate and quarry.

Thus understood, place as a critical category can become a site of resistance. Whereas imperial cartography generates abstract spaces that service biopiracy and the displacement of peoples, a commitment to the alterity of place is a defiance of the effacing element of hegemony. Rather

than accept the establishment of blank spaces on the map, ignoring the specificities of the bioregion, the emphasis of the human and nonhuman constituents of place disrupts the totalizing enterprise of imperialistic claims. Place is the expression of difference against the uniformity of the economic and cultural metropolis. Through landscapes brimming with meaning, as opposed to the stale spaces imposed by imperial geographies, “postcolonial ecology reflects a complex epistemology that recuperates alterity of both history *and* nature” (DeLoughrey 2011, 4).

Empires neglect time and place through homogenizing expansion and annexation of spaces. While postcolonial studies emphasize the relevance of the past in the construction of former colonized cultures, environmental criticism dwells on the significance of place. Both history and place can be woven into a critical discourse that recovers the role of alterity against the hierarchical binaries of imperial logic. When we consider place as the intersection of the other and history in a specific bioregion, it is viable to construct a postcolonial ecology. Take, for example, Gloria Anzaldúa’s critique of the borderlands between the United States and Mexico. The landscape of that region is “a place of contradictions,” for “Hatred, anger and exploitation are the prominent features of this landscape” (Anzaldúa 1999, 19). That place just South of Rio Grande is a place with a history in which the human and nonhuman other have been colonized. Understanding the “contradictions” of that place requires an awareness of the history that is effaced by colonization. In her article titled “Borderlands as Bioregion” (2009) Priscilla Solis Ybarra offers an insightful discussion of the borderlands in Anzaldúa’s book *Borderlands/La Frontera* from a bioregional perspective that incorporates history into the understanding of the exploitation of that specific place that sheds light on the possibilities of a postcolonial ecology. Her reading of the book stresses the effective intersection of history and place, contributing an example of how the collaboration of postcolonial and environmental studies can yield important explorations of how colonization affects human communities and the biosphere.

The emphasis on the embedded relationship between human identity and the nonhuman constituents of the bioregion allows for a biocentric approach. The inclusion of history in the evaluation of place not only reinforces how the bioregion throughout time has constructed the identity of inhabitants, but also reveals how empires efface the narrative of that specific land in favour of a blank slate on which to rewrite their values and politics. Precisely, the cross-pollination of postcolonial and environmental studies is linked to this understanding of place. This possible tangent between was anticipated by Franz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1968): “For a colonized people the most essential value, because the most concrete, is first and foremost the land: the land which will bring them bread and, above all, dignity” (Fanon 1968, 9). The desire for place is perhaps one of the strongest bonds of the colonized others. That which shapes their difference is affected by the attachment they express towards a place. The

restitution of alterity through the meaningful repopulation of abstract spaces fabricated by empires is a first step in establishing a postcolonial ecology.

This site of collaboration is particularly promising in bioregionalism, a field of study deeply committed to negotiating the relationship between the human and nonhuman in a place. Although bioregionalists tend to focus on the hydrographic, topographic, flora, and fauna constituents of particular places, incorporating history into the understanding of a bioregion only enriches the understanding of place. Recently Erin James contributed a chapter in *The Bioregional Imagination* that attempts to trace that precise line of exploration that combines a postcolonial perspective on the understanding of a bioregion: “at first glance bioregionalism and post colonialism appear to have much in common. Both are interested in critiques of dominant power, be it power that stems from the nation, from imperialism, or from globalization. Both are concerned with the recovery of indigenous knowledge and language” (Lynch 2012, 263). James sees an opportunity to enrich the bioregional focus by incorporating postcolonial contexts into her analysis. She then continues her analysis of Nigerian Ben Okri’s book *The Famished Road*, reconciling the text both as a token of bioregional and postcolonial literature. In her chapter both history and the aesthetic of place intertwine so as to offer a convincing interpretation of Okri’s text. She concludes her study by insisting, “bioregionalism offers postcolonial scholars a useful tool in linking narratives of human history, with considerations of ecology and contemporary environmental pressures” (Lynch 2012, 274).

On the other hand, a postcolonial scholar that has sought to collaborate with environmental studies scholars is Bonnie Roos, arguing that “Postcolonial green scholarship must define itself not as a narrow theoretical discourse but as a relatively inclusive methodological framework that is responsive to ongoing political and ecological problems” (Roos 2010, 9). Postcolonial studies must continue to respond to the role of environmental issues in the oppression of others, especially in a context where the changing climate affects the distribution of natural resources. To understand the situation of the colonized other, postcolonial studies must take into account the role that the nonhuman plays in displacement. Thus place also becomes a means of resistance to imperialism for postcolonial scholars. Yet the “attachment to the land or localism itself is not an inherently ethical or ecological position” (DeLoughrey 2011, 6).

Amplified ontological and epistemological ties to a specific habitat may run contrary not only to environmental concerns, but also to postcolonial positions. Place cannot be the sole anchor of analysis, for a postcolonial ecology must focus on “an understanding of how place is lived in and imagined around the world” (Lynch 2012, 273). As James and Roos insist, the cross-pollination of postcolonial and environmental scholarship deploys the concept of place to grasp a global world, where each bioregion is interconnected and embedded within the ecosphere. To exaggerate the presence of place and reject an international context undermines any viable

option of collaboration. And what is more pressing, the neglect of the interconnected dimension of ecosystems and human communities threatens the potential of both schools of criticism separately. Take, for example, Naess's tenet for deep ecology: that all beings are "knots in the biospherical net or field of intrinsic relations" (Naess 1995a, 3). The connection of all beings is closely linked to the notion of "biospherical egalitarianism" in which the human and nonhuman are given equal value in principle. Privileging one place over the rest of the ecosphere contests that first tenet. Something in the same vein could be said for postcolonial studies, for the discussion of the colonized other must assume a broader scope to understand the specific displacement of a community. Raising excessively the significance of place tends to reduce its subversive potential. Rather than emphasize the specificity of the human and nonhuman community, place then becomes a bolster for homogenous identity. Insofar as a particular community finds its *raison d'être* in a place, it can justify its isolation from the rest of the world. Human identity is no longer constituted by the ecosphere, but rather by a specific land that inspires reticence towards the other. In philosophical terms it could be argued that the magnification of place over the entire ecosphere entitles identity over alterity. Diversity no longer is significant, no longer a premise that sustains engagement with the biosphere. A community is defined in opposition to others, rather than embrace the embeddedness of all human and nonhuman beings. Nationalism and provincialism may be said to be manifestations of such emphasis on place.

Our environmental crisis, however, can hardly be solved through a myopic perspective of place. This is one of the reasons that while some notable environmental scholars acknowledge the relevance of Heidegger's philosophy, many others—especially those invested in deep ecology—are reticent to encourage the German philosopher's ontology as basis for their ecosophy (Oelschlaeger 1991, 304). Holy-Luczaj argues in favour of incorporating more productively Heideggerian notions into deep ecology, stating that the philosopher's ontology espouses an egalitarian stance insofar it "rejects the idea of the great chain of being" (Holy-Luczaj 2015, 46). Certainly that perspective sheds light on possible modes of incorporating Heidegger's philosophy, especially in respects to its critique of anthropocentrism. Yet even if he does not insist upon a hierarchy of beings, the significance of place in his *Dasein* is particularly troubling for the elaboration of a postcolonial ecology.

Several ecocritics have taken Heidegger's notion of *Dasein* or Being-in-the-world as a means to reinforce the category of place. Helen Tiffin, for example, employs the term "being-in-the-world" to suggest a revision of anthropocentrism without acknowledging Heideggerian influence (Tiffin 2010, 6). Lawrence Buell, on the other hand, explicitly mentions the role of the German philosopher in his analysis of place (Buell 2005, 65). Tom Lynch, Cheryll Glotfelty, and Karla Armbruster are quick to point out similarities in the use of the term "dwell" used between

Kirkpatrick Sale and Heidegger (Lynch 2012, 5). And Christopher Manes also references Heidegger in his chapter titled "Nature and Silence" in Glotfelty's *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996). Whether or not they explicitly accept the influence of Heidegger, environmental critics encounter Heidegger's ontology in addressing the role of human beings in the environment and the significance of technology on the exploitation of the planet. Granted Heidegger sets in motion an acute critique of modernity and its technological dominance over nature, yet some of ontological premises of his theoretical approach manifest an exaggerated desire for place that excludes the other. I will focus primarily on his notion of *Dasein* and its implications to the understanding of place.

Heidegger's notion of *Dasein* is a critique of anthropocentrism. Instead of referring to human beings, he chooses the term "being-there" or *Da-sein*. He is attempting to present the human being as inseparable from the world that surrounds it: "it can understand itself as bound up in its 'destiny' with the Being of those entities which it encounters within its own world" (Heidegger 1962, 82). Humans are not cut off from the world, but are bound to those nonhuman entities that surround them. Contrary to the varying humanisms in modernity, *Dasein* seeks to reject the idea of human agency by transforming the subject into a passive being thrown out into facticity. Instead of asserting the active dominating role of the human subject, Heidegger focuses on concern or care: "Because Being-in-the-world belongs essentially to *Dasein*, its Being toward the world is essentially taking concern" (Heidegger 1962, 84). If indeed modern philosophy has followed in the steps of René Descartes's *ego cogito* through the technological dominance of the planet, Heidegger's *Dasein* provides a salient shift beyond subjectivity. The latter strains against the logic of representation ingrained in the dilating predominance of the subject in modernity. As such, the contortions found in his linguistic expressions are a rebellion against the logic imposed on language by modernity. Moreover, his critique of the modern subject affects the prevalent anthropocentric paradigm. That is, his *Dasein* encompasses a precise relocation towards place and the significance of stewardship. It is, then, of no surprise that environmental critics inherit such a philosophically-charged discussion. Heidegger, however, employs such a term in a manner that ultimately binds the ontology of place to that of authenticity. Being in a place signifies a "belonging" or "dwelling alongside" that seeks to ground identity (Heidegger 1962, 80). There is no exteriority, only Being.

Heideggerian philosophy insists that no identity is possible without establishing ties to the land, the place that envelops the being-in-the-world. Place determines identity. Taking custody of the place that constitutes the facticity or existence of the *Dasein* reverts into a logic of authenticity: "When the *Dasein* thus brings itself back from the they, the they-self is modified in an existential manner so that it becomes *authentic* being-one's-self" (Heidegger 1962, 313).

Authenticity is a particularly charged concept, one that is criticized in postcolonial studies as manifesting the displacement of the other. Empires many times exert dominance through specific racial politics anchored on a rhetoric of authenticity. Notorious were the policies of the Spanish empire in selectively establishing racial hierarchies on the “purity” of lineage. Heidegger’s linking of place and authenticity results in an ontological rejection of alterity. There is no place for the other, outside of the totality of being. The possibility of a postcolonial ecology must be critical with any notion of authenticity, especially if the goal of such a collaboration is to connect bioregions in our global world. As Buell suggests, we have to reconsider “traditional forms of emplacement” (Buell 2005, 64). Places must be conceptualized in a manner that does not simply exclude or dislocate, but rather reinforce biosphere through the inhabitants of its various bioregions.

Nixon suggests revising that antinomy between postcolonial displacement and ecological emplacement “in terms of cosmopolitanism on the one hand and bioregionalism on the other” (Nixon 2011, 238). Cosmopolitanism is to be understood as a sort of transnationalism, a tendency to connect different communities. It is this transnational perspective that James emphasizes when she insists on understanding “how place is imagined and lived in around the world” (Lynch 2012, 274). Our ecosphere is an interconnected reality, one in which each ecosystem is linked to the rest of the planet. Postcolonial ecologies can effectively defend the importance of understanding different places within the biosphere, a tenet present in deep ecology. Bioregionalism centres on locality, on a region established by natural factors. Bioregionalists move “away from existing but for the most part arbitrary political boundaries (nations, states, countries, cities, etc.) in favour of those that emerged from a biotically determined framework” (Lynch 2012, 2). The nuanced approach of bioregionalism to place, one that is not invested in ontology inasmuch as the diversity of a life-place, is valuable for the engagement of postcolonial ecologies. Place as a source of human and nonhuman diversity is an effective point of intersection between postcolonial and environmental studies. Many of the scholars committed to both schools of criticism are engaged in joining transnationalism and bioregionalism in an effort to better grasp the interconnected nature of the biosphere. From James’s approach to an African postcolonial context with the lens of a bioregionalist, to Ybarra’s analysis of the borderlands in Anzaldúa as a bioregion, the emergence of postcolonial ecologies is bringing together varied perspectives committed to challenging our global environmental crisis through an understanding of humans and nonhumans engage in places pregnant with history.

One way of reinforcing this collaboration necessary in the emergence of postcolonial ecologies is through the mechanism of pollination. Perhaps one of the most fundamental processes in nature, one whose decline signals the impending ecological crisis, is that of the pollination that

different species of bees and other insects perform. Pollen from different plants found in specific habitats is collected and combined so as to maintain the cycle of flora in those specific environments. Pollination fosters diversity. It introduces the notion of place to that of interconnectedness between different bioregions, suggesting that local emplacements are the sites of potential nutrients for transnational exchanges. Rather than focus on authenticity and the distilling of culture through place, pollination insists on the crossing of heterogeneous habitats in order to sustain their corresponding heterogeneity so important for the biosphere. Through the regenerative amalgamation of different localities, transnational and global issues are addressed in a far more nuanced manner. Displacement is introduced in the construction of the colonized, for pollination requires a dynamic understanding of the human and nonhuman. Emphasis is not placed on sedentary notions of land or place, but rather on the fluidity and diversity of ecosystems. Essentially such a paradigm offers a dynamic understanding of the biosphere that bridges the difficulties that arise from anchoring environmental studies in an exclusive and static conception of nature. Postcolonial ecocriticism may find in such a concept a fertile ground for collaboration, one that transforms inherited modes of emplacement so as to better adjust bioregionalism to transnationalism.

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